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ABSTRACT

With the passage of Article 31, Rhode Island set out to transform the state's education system. This report is the first annual analysis of the work catalyzed by Article 31. Section 1 briefly outlines the events leading to this historic initiative. Section 2 describes the 1996-97 student assessment results, which are the baseline against which future progress will be measured. Section 3 describes the variety of partnerships that have already been mobilized at state and local levels to improve these student results. Section 4 describes the continuing challenges that threaten the state's ability to realize the full promise of the Article 31 plans, and section 5 outlines future directions and actions to be taken. (Contains 11 charts, 2 tables, and 6 end notes.) (SLD)

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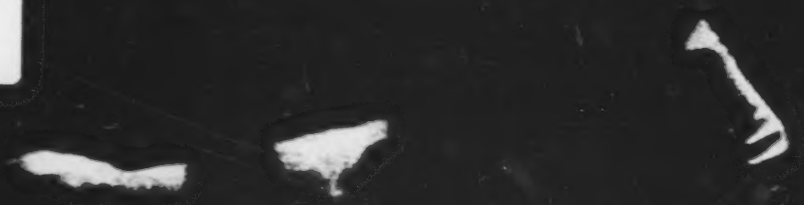
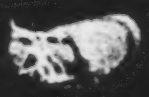


Information Works!



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Information Works!

A Statewide Analysis
1998

March 1998

Dear Rhode Islanders:

Information is power. In education, as in business and government, information can help us describe our current position, identify our goals and guide us in planning the steps that will help us meet those goals. In this spirit the General Assembly passed Article 31, "Rhode Island's Student Support Initiative," which called for building an information system capable of producing rich, valuable data about Rhode Island schools. They did so on behalf of the citizens of our state and in cooperation with Governor Almond and the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) responded to this call by joining forces with the University of Rhode Island's National Center for Public Education and Social Policy (NCPE). Together, these two agencies married RIDE's blueprint for school support and improvement with NCPE's cutting edge technology, expertise and experience to create *Information Works: Measuring Schools for Change*. That 850-page publication contains two-page snapshots of every public school and school district in Rhode Island. The document in hand, *Information Works: A Statewide Analysis*, is the larger book's summary companion. It offers a policy perspective on the results of the state as a whole and begins to outline both the challenges to and recommendations for meeting them.

Bear in mind that much of the information is newly gathered. Inevitably we will find gaps between what we know today and what we will want and need to know to help schools as they continue working to improve. Still, we must share what we have now to set the stage for future years, and to monitor progress from this point forward. Next year we will strengthen the information on student achievement with findings from surveys of parents, students, teachers and administrators about school practices and climate. Over time, we will also have detailed, easily comparable financial information at both the school and district level.

Within these pages we are proud to report success stories. We have also noted some of our weaknesses, particularly achievement gaps between schools, and between groups of students with different characteristics. Please view the weaknesses as an invitation to engage with the schools and districts – supportively – to close the gaps and generally improve student achievement. Exposing both the successes and the weaknesses will help guide us through this transition towards developing a world class school system of which all our citizenry can be justly proud.

Sincerely,

Peter McWalters

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

With the passage of Article 31, Rhode Island's Student Investment Initiative, the Rhode Island General Assembly, Governor Lincoln Almond and Rhode Island's Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education created historic policy agreement in our state. This policy agreement sets the stage to transform our education system

From	To
36 school systems working in locally determined ways toward locally determined and quite different goals for students, with the state serving a modest and largely regulatory role.	36 systems working in locally appropriate ways to ensure that all students meet common, clear and high standards, supported in their efforts by a state that provides information, support and when necessary, push.
A state in which students' academic performance and consequent life opportunities tend to be defined by the income level of their parents and surrounding communities.	A Rhode Island in which all students have an equal chance at high academic performance and the opportunities that follow, no matter the community in which they live.
A work force prepared for the skills-based economy of the past that cannot attract or hold the industry our state needs for sustained economic growth.	A workforce prepared for the skills, knowledge and idea-based economy of the future that will attract the economic development our state needs.
A culture of blame in which we point fingers at others when students do not perform successfully.	A culture of responsibility in which each of us steps in wherever necessary to ensure student success.

This report is the first annual analysis of the work catalyzed by Article 31. Section I briefly outlines the events leading to this historic occasion. Section II describes the 1996-97 student assessment results – the baseline from which future progress will be measured. Section III describes the variety of partnerships that already have been mobilized at the state and local levels to improve these student results. Section IV outlines continuing challenges that threaten our ability to realize the full promise of Article 31, and Section V outlines future directions and actions to be taken.

I. Fast Forwarding to the Future – The Power of Article 31

The history of education policy in Rhode Island, until recently, was succinctly summarized in *Education Week*'s 1997 *Quality Counts* report, "Strong Headwinds," as a wealth of ideas that had little effect on student performance.[1] There was no shortage of energy and ideas in our state, but there was a shortage of common agreement on appropriate goals for students, how progress toward those goals should be assessed, and who should be held accountable for their realization. Consequently, student achievement improved only modestly, if at all, for a decade.

These achievement results are unacceptable. In an increasingly global economy, flat achievement signifies losing ground and modest growth is simply not enough. Being competitive and prepared requires increasingly higher levels of knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge to ever more complex tasks.

In Rhode Island, we must present potential employers with a highly educated workforce to retain and attract the businesses and jobs our state needs. We also need an educated citizenry for our democracy to function well at all levels. If the relatively flat achievement of the past continues, it will prevent the sustained economic growth and healthy community-building we seek.

In response, Governor Lincoln Almond and the Board of Regents put forth a coherent plan for educational reform in the form of the *Comprehensive Education Strategy* (CES) in 1996. The CES, developed by the Rhode Island Goals 2000 Panel, established a clear agenda of high standards, meaningful assessments and accountability for school improvement, yet political momentum was lacking. The sense of urgency required to bring about more than incremental change was missing.

In June 1997, Rhode Island's General Assembly changed all that with the passage of Article 31: Article 31 demanded dramatic improvement in student achievement; targeted resources to that end; shortened implementation timelines and communicated urgency. The passage of Article 31 made the CES *the* state-wide education agenda, rather than one of a number of recommended actions for educators to consider taking.

Article 31 demands that student performance grow ever stronger in our state. To meet this test, *all of us* – educators, parents, policymakers, business leaders and members of the larger community – must maintain a relentless focus on results, buttressed by the leadership, resources, information and capacity required to improve them. The General Assembly has begun to provide the necessary leadership and resources through Article 31. The Assembly also squarely charged the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), in concert with local schools, districts and their communities, with building the information base required to plan thoughtfully for the changes that will improve student performance, and with building the capacity – knowledge, skills and abilities – required to make those plans bear fruit.

Article 31 has given us the opportunity to put all of the necessary pieces in place. It builds on the good work of the past and boldly accelerates it to the future.

"K through 12 education is a key building block in the New Economy, the key aspect of a healthy business climate for several reasons. First, a strong elementary and secondary education system prepares young people to enter the work force or go on to further education . . . But a strong K-12 education system is also important to make Rhode Island attractive to outside business and residents . . . A top quality school system is among the major factors in determining where these types of households with children will locate. In addition, if Rhode Island is to grow, it will do so by attracting out-of-state residents to move here. In particular, the ability to attract engineers, professionals and managers to Rhode Island will be critical if we are to build the industries of the future. Lack of a strong education system is a barrier to attracting these types of individuals."

Rhode Island Economic Policy Council. (1997). *Meeting the Challenge of the New Economy.* Providence, RI: Author, p. 328.

"As adults responsible for the growth of the next generation we should know that we are not doing our jobs unless we provide youth with opportunities to live right – that is, with chances to do their best. A just society is one in which men and women, rich and poor, the gifted and the handicapped, have an equal opportunity to use and to increase all their abilities, each according to her or his talents. We are still a long way from reaching that goal, but every step we take in that direction will make life richer and more meaningful for all."

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Keven Rathunde, Samuel Whalen. (1997). Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure. NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 260.

Realizing the Promise

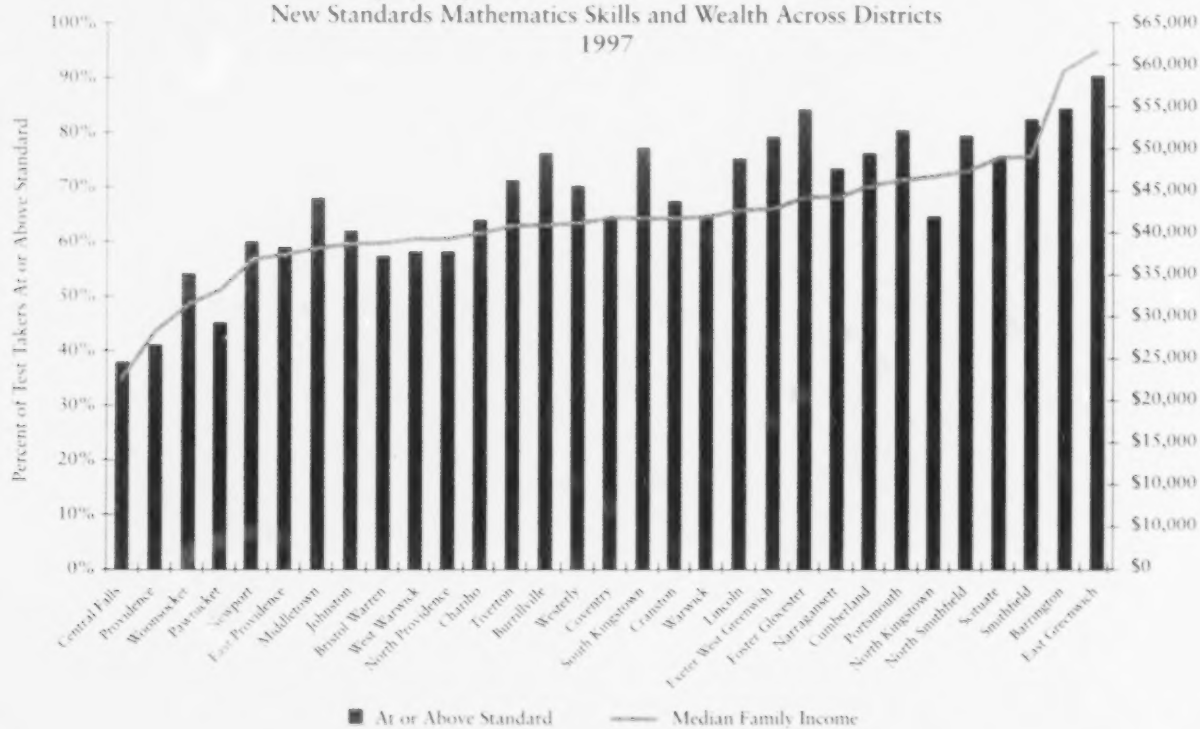
Our challenge now is to stay the course. Rhode Islanders need to use this opportunity of historic policy agreement to create a culture of responsibility. Such a culture includes: the responsibility to generate and examine useful information about the quality of education students receive and their resulting achievement, the responsibility to act on that information, and above all, the responsibility to "do right" by all kids.

Student test scores in Rhode Island today are all too easy to predict based on a community's income. Students from poor communities tend to achieve poorer educational results which can lead to a downward spiral of little job opportunity and other unfortunate life outcomes. Students from wealthier communities tend to achieve better educational results which often spiral upward to multiple job and other opportunities that define "the good life" in our state and in our nation.

Working together, our job is to reduce, if not eliminate, this relationship between income and achievement by ensuring that all children receive the resources, inspiration and support they need to reach high standards.

A culture of responsibility means that if one party is unable, for whatever reason, to provide for the needs of an individual child, another party stands ready and willing to step in. Education and educators cannot meet the needs of all children by themselves. We all must work together.

Equity Gaps: Grade Ten Achievement Levels on New Standards Mathematics Skills and Wealth Across Districts 1997



Source: Income Data from 1990 Census

II. The Baseline – A Wake-up Call to Rhode Island

For the first time in 1997, RIDE reported state assessment results based on Regents' standards for student performance. These results serve as the baseline against which we can measure future progress in improving student achievement. The 1997 assessment results, confirmed by Rhode Island's results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), serve as a wake-up call to all communities in our state. *Our students are not prepared to be successful in the new economy of the 21st century.*

Specifically, these results tell us that:

1. Students' achievement is largely predictable by the median income of their communities.
2. Students do better in the areas on which we've historically focused – basic skills.
3. Students do poorly in the advanced skills they need now and in the 21st century.
4. Even the students in Rhode Island's highest performing districts are performing poorly relative to our state's high standards.
5. There are substantial performance gaps between different groups of students defined by gender, race and ethnicity and special needs.

Achievement is Too Easily Predicted by Income

Chart 1 demonstrates the strong relationship between median family income and student achievement at the district level. It graphs median family income against the percentage of students at or above standard in grade 10 math skills. With some notable exceptions, the two lines track with one another, trending upward as median income increases. This consistency between income and achievement has held for at least ten years.

There are Large Gaps in Student Performance

The 1997 assessment results allow Rhode Islanders to measure the gaps in student performance that Article 31 seeks to close. These gaps are of two kinds: the gaps between actual student achievement and the state's standards (standards gap), and the gaps between the achievement of different groups of students as defined by poverty, gender, race and ethnicity, and special needs (equity gaps). Collectively, we must understand the magnitude and implications of these gaps and work together to close them over time.

Table 1

The Rhode Island Public Educational System At A Glance

The Numbers 1996-97	
Students	150,556
Teachers	10,496
Schools	327
Districts*	36
State Operated Schools	3
The Students 1996-97	
Eligible For Free or Reduced Lunch	35%
Participating in Bilingual/ESL Programs	7%
Receiving Special Education Services	15%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	78%
Black	7%
Hispanic	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
Governance	
Semi-Independent Board of Regents appointed by Governor	
State Legislature Functions as "School Committee for the State"	
Average Expenditure Per Pupil 1995-96	
Overall (7th in the nation)	$ 7,233
General Instruction	$ 3,781
Bilingual/ESL Instruction	$ 3,781
Special Education	$ 18,779
Education Finances 1994-95**	
Per Capita Expenditure on Education as a Percent of Per Capita Expenditure on Total Government	26%
1994 Per Capita Income (20th in the nation)	$ 21,948
Funding from Local Sources (13th in the nation)	55%
Funding from State Sources (37th in the nation)	41%

*Includes the State operated district of Central Falls. **Source: NEA, "Rankings of the States 1996"

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chart 2

Gaps to Standard: Rhode Island
Mathematics Performance Levels at the Tenth Grade
1997

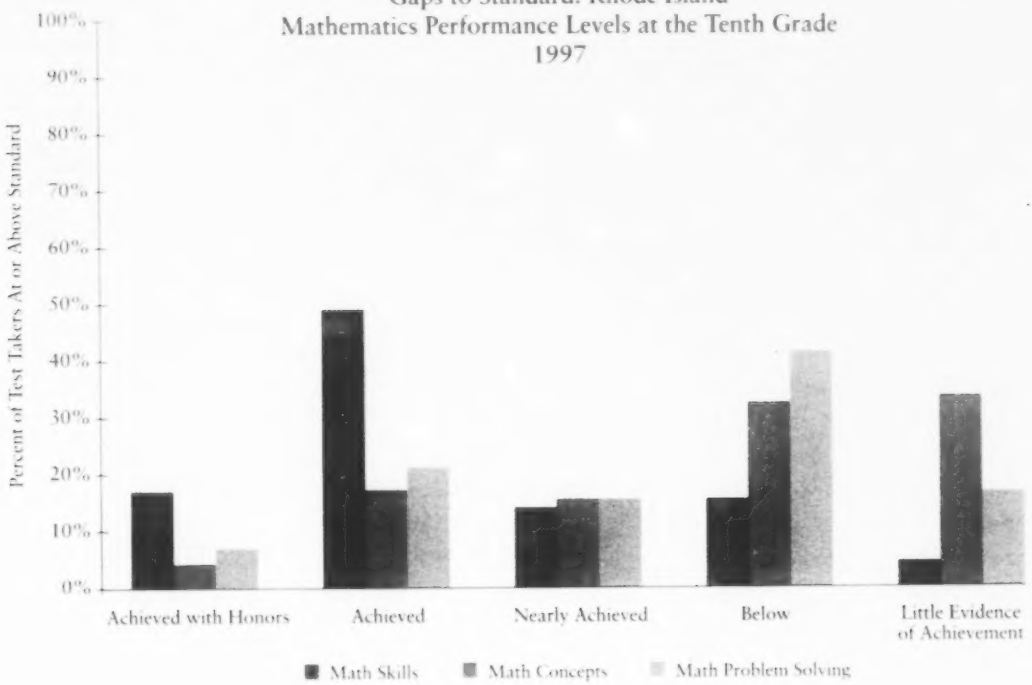


chart 3

Gaps to Standard: Grade Ten Achievement Levels
on New Standards Mathematics Skills Exam
1997

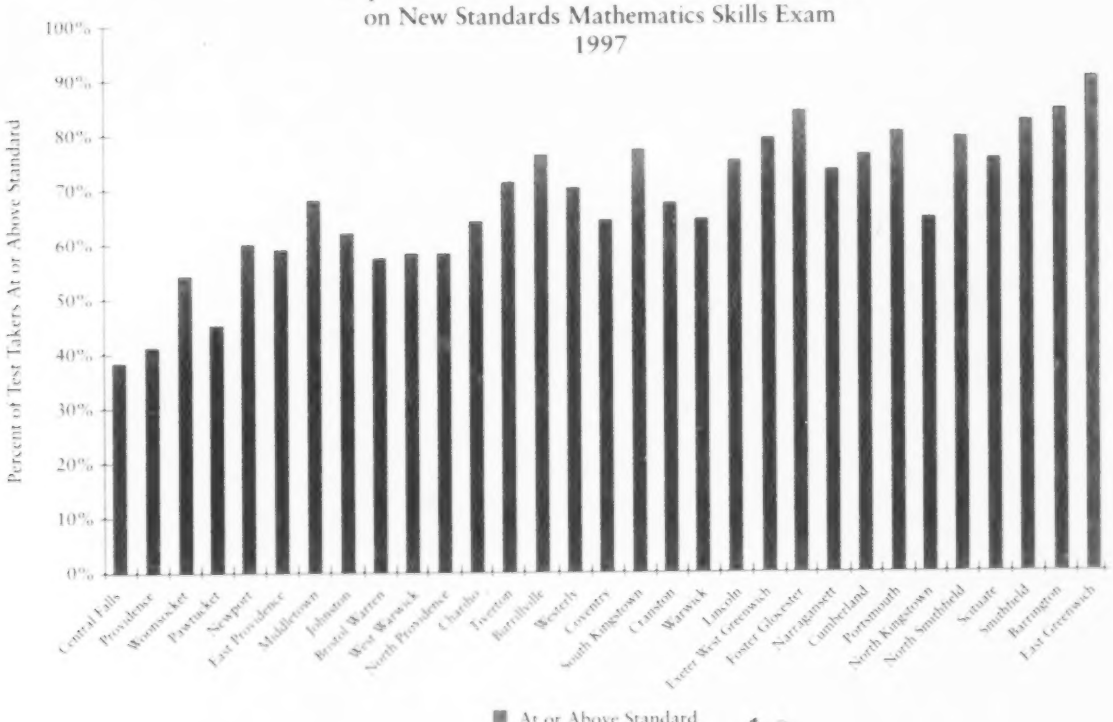
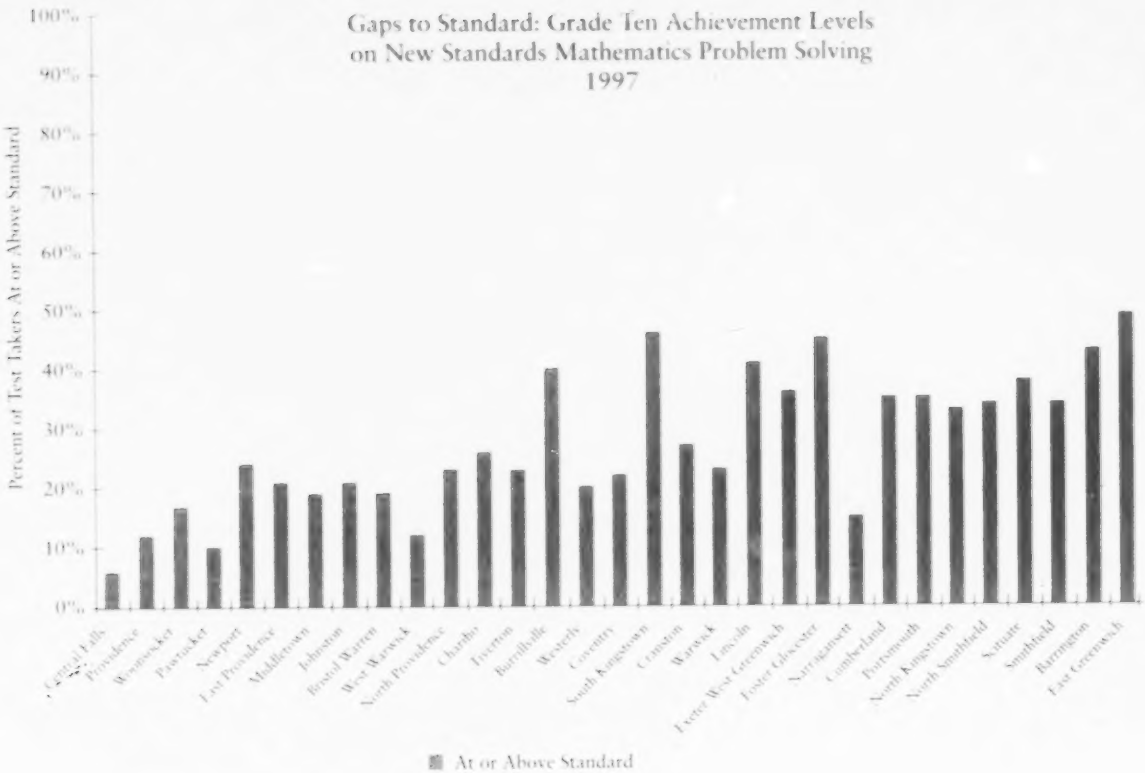


chart 4

Gaps to Standard: Grade Ten Achievement Levels
on New Standards Mathematics Problem Solving
1997



Standards Gaps

Chart 2 portrays the standards gap in tenth grade mathematics in the areas of skills, concepts and problem solving. This chart shows that Rhode Island students performed better in the area on which we have historically focused – basic skills – with 63% of all students meeting or exceeding the standard. Student performance in the areas needed to excel in the 21st century, however, is worrisome. Only 18% of all students met or exceeded the standard in math concepts, and 25% met or exceeded the standard in problem solving.

Charts 3, 4 and 5 depict local standards gaps in grade 10 math skills, math problem solving, and in writing. Each chart shows the percentage of students in each district who met or exceeded the standard in the respective subject area. Districts are ordered by family median income, with the community with the lowest median income at the far left.

These graphs demonstrate the following:

- Rhode Island's students perform better in the area of math skills than they do in either math problem solving or writing.
- There is a substantial range in student performance by district that again roughly mirrors wealth and family background:

  90 percent of all students in East Greenwich, our wealthiest community, met or exceeded the standard in math skills, compared to 38 percent of all students in our poorest community – Central Falls.

  Student performance in math problem solving ranged from a high of 49 percent of students at or above standard, to a low of 6 percent.

  In writing, the percentage of students at or above standard ranged from 70 to 21 percent.

- There are large standards gaps in even our most highly performing communities:

  In math problem solving, more than half the students failed to meet the standard in our three highest performing communities – East Greenwich, South Kingstown and Foster-Glocester.

  In writing, nearly a third of the students failed to meet the standard in East Greenwich, more than a third failed to meet the standard in Barrington, and nearly half failed to meet the standard in Scituate.

chart 5

Gaps to Standard: Grade Ten Achievement Levels
on the Writing Assessment
1997

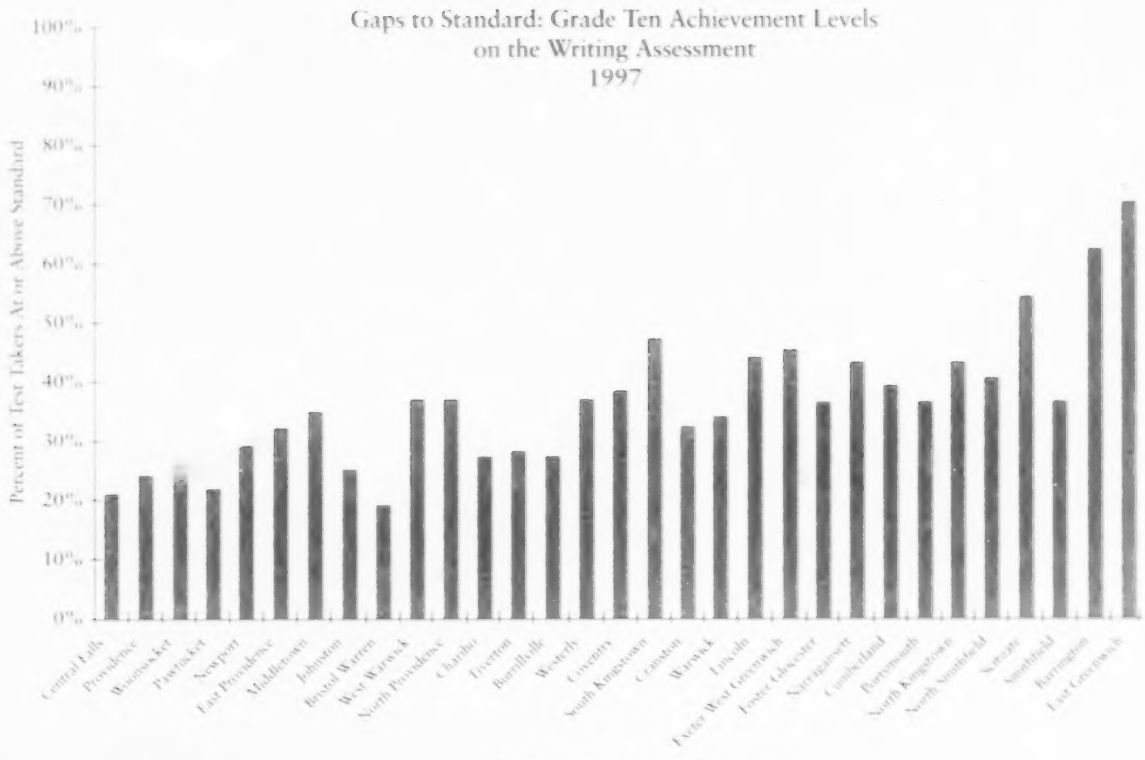
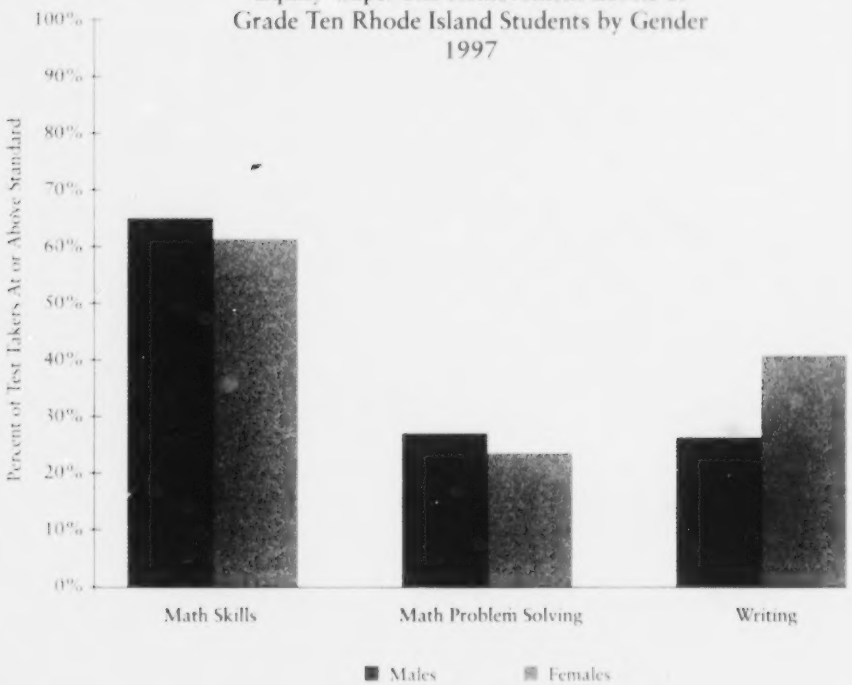


chart 6

Equity Gaps: The Achievement Levels of
Grade Ten Rhode Island Students by Gender
1997



Equity Gaps

Gaps exist in student performance between males and females, students of different races and ethnicities, and students who do and do not have special needs. Such gaps need to be addressed and eliminated. Equity gaps are shown in the areas of grade 10 math skills and problem solving and grade 10 writing in charts 6 through 8.

Chart 6 shows equity gaps by gender, Chart 7 by race and ethnicity, and Chart 8 by special needs.

These charts demonstrate the following:

- There is a large performance gap between females and males in writing, with females outperforming males.
- Statistically similar proportions of whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders meet or exceed the standard in each assessment area, as do statistically similar proportions of blacks and Hispanics. There are performance gaps between these two sets of groups in every subject. (The group of students who categorized themselves as "Other," was a very small proportion of the overall sample.)
- There are large performance gaps between students in general education and those in special education or limited English programs, with students in general education outperforming students in the other two groups.

chart 7

Equity Gaps: The Achievement Levels of
Grade Ten Rhode Island Students by Racial/Ethnic Group
1997

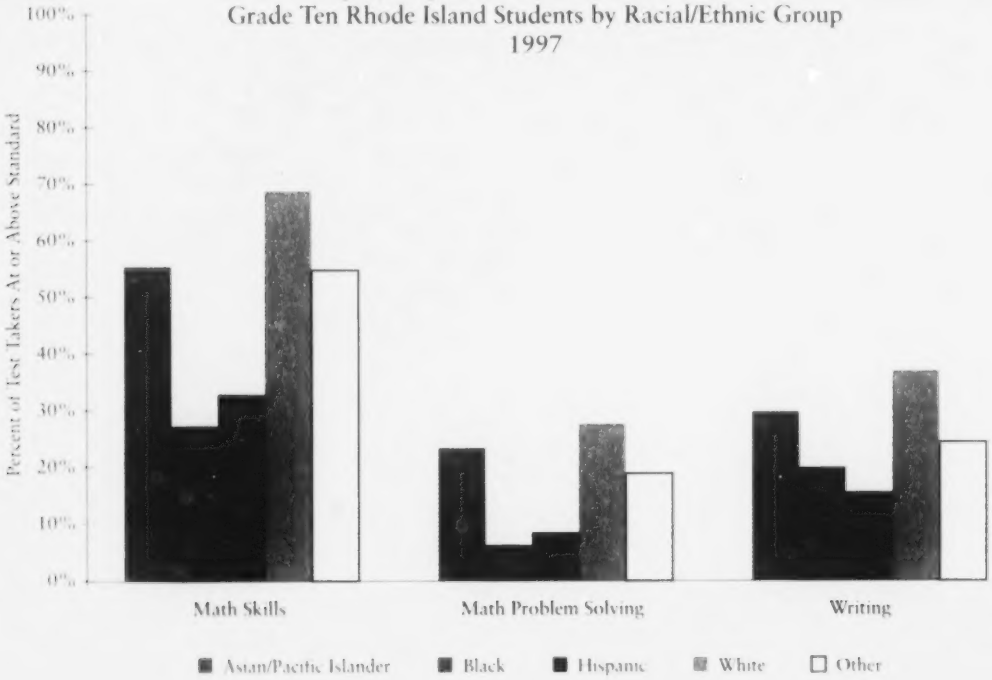
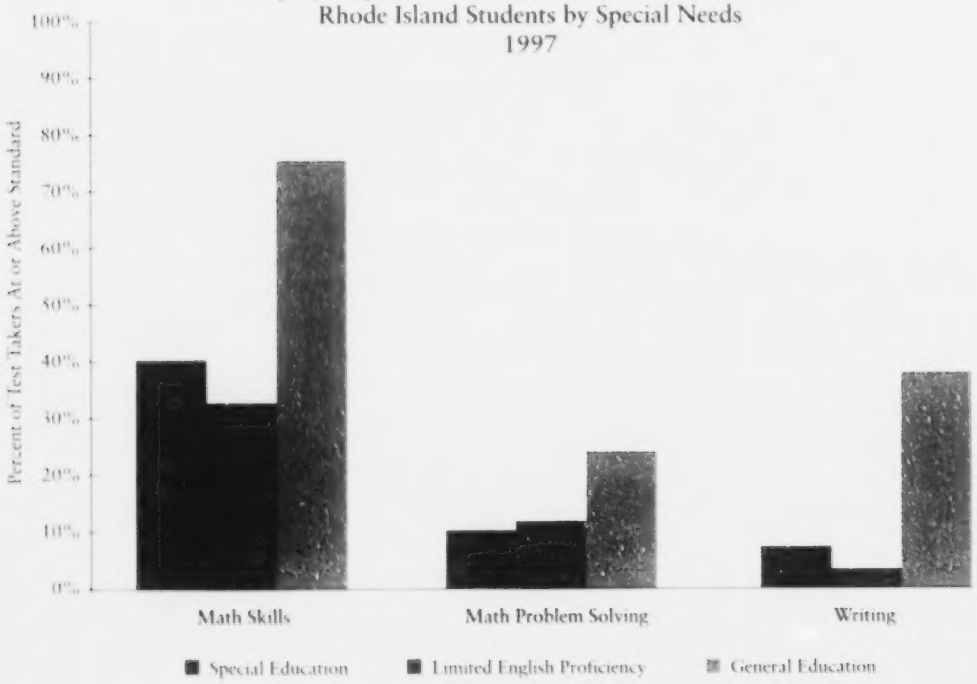


chart 8

Equity Gaps: The Achievement Levels of Grade Ten
Rhode Island Students by Special Needs
1997

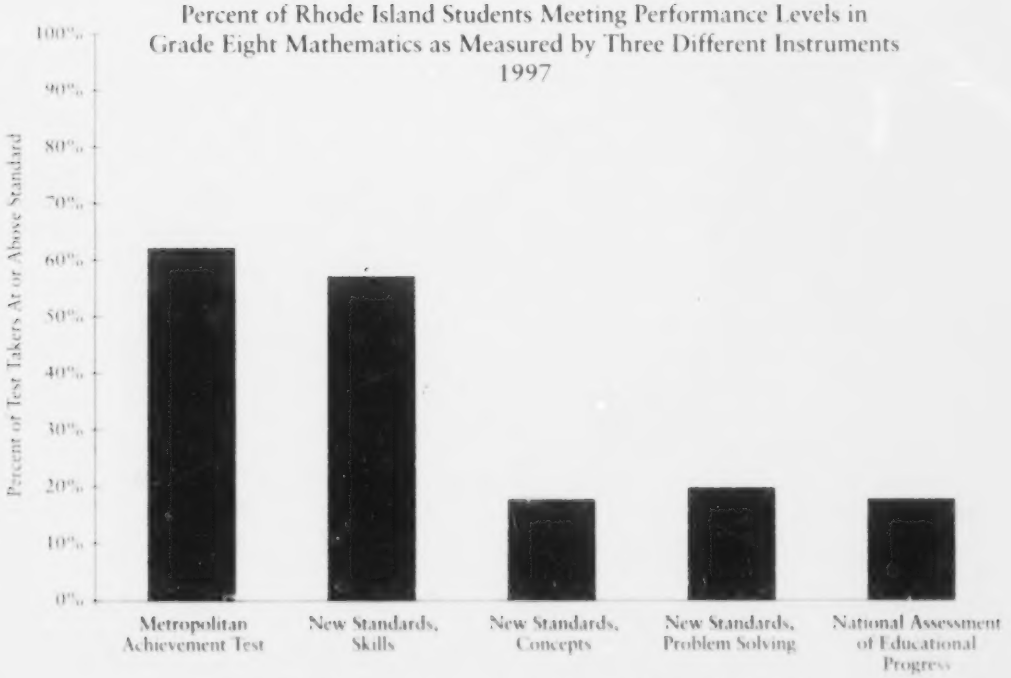


While not entirely parallel, the performance of Rhode Island students on other assessments given nationally is consistent with the Rhode Island state assessment results. Chart 9 shows eighth grade student performance in math on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT), the New Standards Reference Exams and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). (State-level NAEP data is not available for the tenth grade.) This chart shows that student performance on New Standards skills is similar to student performance on the MAT – a test of largely basic skills. Student performance on New Standards concepts and problem solving is similar to student performance on NAEP – a test requiring the application of skills and knowledge.

Finally, the 1997 data allow us to compare the performance of students in individual schools with all other similar students in the state. Rhode Island's goal is to have *all students reach proficiency*. We know, however, that at this point in time, schools and the students who attend them do not start on a level playing field. Looking at the performance of similar students allows for fairer comparisons and can guide setting intermediate benchmarks toward achieving the goal of 100% proficiency. Schools can establish benchmarks by examining the practices of successful schools.

chart 9

Percent of Rhode Island Students Meeting Performance Levels in Grade Eight Mathematics as Measured by Three Different Instruments 1997



Note: MAT results refer to the percent of students at or above the 40th percentile.

Table 2 lists all of the high schools in the state according to their performance on the state's grade 10 assessments. The numbers in the table show the proportion of test takers who met or exceeded the standard. The colors and type styles show whether that proportion is greater, comparable to, or smaller than the proportion of similar students statewide. The most striking aspect of this chart is that Central Falls Junior-Senior High School is among the top four high schools on the list because their students outperformed their similar peers in all three areas. While Central Falls has low absolute numbers of students reaching the standards, its students are outperforming others like them state-wide. In the future, educators and others might look to Central Falls to see if these results hold over time and if so, to better understand the reasons for their relative success.

1997 assessment results sound an alarm about our students' current ability to perform at high standards. They also give cause for hope, however, because they show that what educators focus on is what students learn. Historically, educators in Rhode Island, and in the nation, have focused on the attainment of basic skills. Now that we have broadened our focus to encompass the skills, knowledge and abilities required for the 21st century, we anticipate improvement in these areas as well.

III. The Response – Shared Responsibility for Improving Student Performance

Article 31 provides a unique opportunity to turn student achievement around in Rhode Island. Doing this requires a variety of strategic partnerships focused on supporting students, teachers, schools and families. Just as individual firms alone cannot develop all of the ideas and approaches necessary to compete in the new economy,[2] RIDE and schools alone cannot muster all of the forces required to meet the needs of every child and improve the practices of every school. RIDE's partnerships will: support the implementation of the School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) system; support the broader needs of children and their families; retool and support the education profession; and develop strong connections between education and business.

1. Support the implementation of the SALT system

SALT is designed to help schools use quality information to improve dramatically student achievement.

SALT requires educators, joined by parents, to:

1. Collect and analyze information about student performance, teaching and learning, and the school as a learning organization.
2. Prepare a locally-owned school improvement plan.
3. Act on and then revisit that plan in light of lessons learned. This process will be punctuated by periodic visits to the school by teams of practitioners and other community members.

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Table 2

1997 Grade Ten Performance by School:
Percent of Test Takers at or Above Standard

School Name	Mathematics Skills	Mathematics Problem Solving	Writing
Exeter-West Greenwich High School	**79%**	**37%**	**45%**
*East Greenwich High School	**90%**	**48%**	**70%**
*Central Falls Jr-Sr High School	**38%**	**6%**	**21%**
Barrington High School	**83%**	**43%**	**62%**
Classical High School	**71%**	29%	**66%**
*Rogers High School	**60%**	**24%**	29%
*Burrillville High School	**75%**	**40%**	27%
*South Kingstown High School	77%	**46%**	47%
*Block Island School	75%	**63%**	36%
Tiverton High School	**71%**	23%	28%
North Smithfield Jr-Sr High School	**79%**	34%	40%
Cumberland High School	**76%**	35%	39%
Ponaganset High School	**84%**	**45%**	***36%***
*Narragansett High School	73%	***15%***	**43%**
Coventry High School	64%	***23%***	38%
*Woonsocket High School	54%	16%	26%
*Alternate Learning Project	31%	0%	13%
*Mount Pleasant High School	28%	5%	18%
*Hope High School	25%	4%	9%
*Central High School	30%	12%	9%
*Shea High School	41%	7%	13%
*William E Tolman High School	48%	12%	29%
North Kingstown Sr High School	65%	33%	43%
Davies Career-Tech High School	29%	7%	8%
Lincoln Senior High School	75%	40%	44%
*East Providence High School	59%	21%	32%
Cranston High School West	71%	31%	39%
Portsmouth High School	**80%**	34%	***36%***
Toll Gate High School	***63%***	31%	38%
Scituate High School	***76%***	38%	54%
*Chamber of Commerce	***22%***	0%	11%
*Westerly High School	70%	***20%***	37%
Pilgrim High School	67%	***20%***	31%
Middletown High School	68%	***18%***	35%
Smithfield High School	82%	34%	***36%***
West Warwick High School	***58%***	12%	37%
Warwick Veterans High School	***59%***	18%	34%
Feinstein High School	***24%***	3%	< 8%
*Johnston Senior High School	62%	***21%***	***25%***
Chariho High School	***64%***	***26%***	***27%***
*Mt Hope High School	***57%***	***19%***	***19%***
North Providence High School	***58%***	***23%***	***37%***
Cranston High School	***63%***	***23%***	***25%***

show that the percentage is **more** than the proportion of similar students statewide
Italic Bold show that the percentage is **less** than the proportion of similar students statewide
*The participation rate in one or more assessments is below 80% and the results may not represent the true performance of the school.

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Multiple partners have contributed to the development and are necessary to the success of this accountability system:

The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (The LAB at Brown) and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR), also at Brown University, continue to be significant partners in design and conceptualization. Staff contribute expertise in the areas of accountability, equity and public policy. They work alongside RIDE, creating a marriage of ideas and perspectives. This partnership created a firm conceptual and grass-roots grounding of SALT. In addition, the LAB and AISR have contributed staff resources to the direction and development of *Information Works*.

The University of Rhode Island's National Center on Public Education and Social Policy (URI/NCPE) has recently joined in a major partnership with RIDE. URI/NCPE, under the direction of Dr. Robert Felner, brings to the partnership nationally renowned expertise in the area of information-driven school improvement. URI/NCPE has generously committed its expertise and over 1.5 million dollars of its own resources toward the delivery of the school and district reports in *Information Works* and the development, administration and analysis of the SALT Survey. The survey provides detailed information on school practices that directly influence student achievement. Both efforts will provide invaluable information to schools and communities as they engage in the SALT self-study process.

The SALT Pilot Schools have been essential partners with RIDE in the development of SALT by contributing the hard work of dozens of educators. These schools and educators are pioneering the school visit and the self-study process. They continue to give RIDE staff feedback on the design and implementation of SALT that improves the process immeasurably.

The SALT Pilot Schools and their districts are:

Kickemuit Middle School, Bristol Warren
Coventry Middle School, Coventry
Ponaganset High School, Ponaganset Middle School, Foster-Glocester
Gaudet Middle School, Middletown
Narragansett Elementary School, Narragansett
Joseph Jenks Junior High School, Virginia Cunningham Elementary School, Pawtucket
Asa Messer Elementary School, Reservoir Avenue Elementary School, Sackett Street Elementary School, Vartan Gregorian Elementary at Fox Point, William D'Abate Elementary School, Providence
Deering Middle School, West Warwick
Citizens Memorial Elementary School, Woonsocket
Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program

RIDE also partners with networks of schools as one of its central school improvement strategies. *Rhode Island Middle Level Educators* and *Breaking Ranks* provide forums for exchanging ideas and promoting quality middle level and secondary education, respectively.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), the accrediting association for high schools in New England, has examined its own self-study and school visit procedures with a view to enhancing them and making them more consistent with SALT. NEASC's willingness to partner with RIDE has meant that both organizations can profit from each other's learnings. It has also worked to spare schools the burden of avoidable duplication of effort.

2. Support the broader needs of children and their families

The *Children's Cabinet* comprises the Directors of the state departments of Administration and its Office of Library and Information Services; Children, Youth and Families; Health; Human Services; Labor and Training; and Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals, the Commissioners of Elementary and Secondary Education and of Higher Education, and the Governor's Policy Director.

The Cabinet works to achieve three broad outcomes:

- All children enter school ready to learn.
- All youth leave school prepared to lead productive lives.
- All children and youth shall be safe in their homes, neighborhoods and schools.

These outcomes have guided the work of several state-level task forces and committees including: the Rhode Island Policymakers' Team (sponsored by the Danforth Foundation), the RIDE Strategic Planning Team, the Child Opportunity Zone Family Center Initiative (including Starting Points) and the Governor's Juvenile Justice Task Force. They also guide the "Starting Right Initiative" – a partnership of the Department of Human Services, RIDE, and the Department of Children, Youth and Families – that has been proposed recently by the Governor and General Assembly.

Cabinet outcomes have also guided related initiatives such as: *Healthy Schools! Healthy Kids!*, and the *Rhode Island Keys to Quality Accreditation Project. Healthy Schools! Healthy Kids!* is a statewide plan for comprehensive school health programs developed by the School Health Advisory Council, RIDE and the Rhode Island Department of Health, and funded by the United States Centers for Disease Control.

The *Keys to Quality Project* is a collaborative effort of RIDE and the Rhode Island Child Care Training System at Children's Friend and Service. The project seeks to improve early childhood education of children with and without disabilities by assisting school districts and early childhood programs pursuing accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

3. Retool and support the education profession

The Rhode Island Professional Development and Certification Policy Consortium was convened by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education in the spring of 1993. Members include the Deans of Education at Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island, the Presidents of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIAFT) and National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI), the Presidents of the Rhode Island Associations of School Administrators and School Principals, and the Commissioner. The group is developing an outcome-based system of professional preparation, certification, and life-long professional development which focuses on enabling educators to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes for all children.

The Consortium has provided leadership for: creating the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards; piloting new performance assessments for pre-service teachers; redesigning the teacher preparation program approval process; and developing the template for individual professional development plans. In the future, the Consortium will provide leadership in the creation of mentoring programs for teachers in the first years of practice, and the redesign of renewable teacher certification.

The recently created *Center for School Leadership (CSL)* is a partnership between the Rhode Island Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, RIDE, Rhode Island Middle Level Educators, the LAB at Brown, Breaking Ranks, the Rhode Island Associations of School Administrators and School Principals, and Rhode Island College. The CSL will provide high quality professional development to school leaders in the areas of leadership, technology, management, school change, student achievement and issues of diversity.

The Rhode Island Network for Educational Technology (RINET) is a statewide partnership of RIDE, the Office of Library and Information Services, Brown University, the University of Rhode Island, and districts, as represented by their regional educational collaboratives and the Providence School Department. RINET provides a statewide telecommunications infrastructure for K-12 education and public libraries, internet use, e-mail accounts for educators, and technical support services, including E-rate reimbursements.

"Most young people progress from school to work following the expected pattern. However, probing more deeply into the quality of the process raises difficult questions. Roughly a third of all high school graduates, and somewhat more high school dropouts, fail to find stable employment by the time they are thirty. Even if some of this group do better in the next few years, a substantial fraction of the cohort is still in trouble. For this group, the rather casual American system does not work well."

Paul Osterman. (1995). "The youth labor market: Skill deficiencies and public policy," in *The Changing Nature of Work*, Ed. Ann Howard. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, p. 225.

4. Develop strong connections between education and business

The Human Resource Investment Council (HRIC) on which the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education serves, has provided a large number of grants to businesses around the state to work on continuous improvement. Many of these grants require that the business sites work with schools.

The Rhode Island Skills Commission, a non-profit organization sponsored in part by HRIC, RIDE, RIAFT and NEARI, works to restructure schools to support students' attainment of high standards. The Commission is developing a Certificate of Initial Mastery and a Certificate of Advanced Mastery which will certify student attainment of standards and will focus high schools and postsecondary institutions on the career development of all students.

The Director of the *Department of Labor and Training* and RIDE's Commissioner received a grant from the German Marshall Fund of the United States to send teams of Rhode Islanders to visit Swiss and German companies in order to learn more about the apprenticeship systems of these countries. They also have established a *Work-Based Learning Design and Implementation Committee*, co-chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, a Representative of the General Assembly, the Secretary/Treasurer of the AFL-CIO, and the CEO of Arkwright Incorporated. The goal of this committee is to provide work-based learning experiences for all Rhode Island students prior to high school graduation.

The state of Rhode Island has received a $12 million federal grant to implement a school to career system from 1998 to 2003. The grant is administered through five School to Career Partnership Councils, each including representatives of business, labor and education. Augmenting that effort, RIDE received a $5 million special education systems change grant from the federal Office of Special Education Programs to help youths with special needs make successful transitions to employment.

RIDE, with leadership from the General Assembly, is also working with schools and districts to implement In$ite – a uniform financial reporting system developed by Coopers & Lybrand. In$ite will provide clear and consistent data on school resources and spending. This will add further crucial information through which to examine the workings of schools and how those workings influence student performance.

Providing Support, Push and Intervention

As the work of SALT and Article 31 continues to unfold, the number of partnerships needed to accomplish it will only grow. The next challenge that lies before RIDE and its partners is to help schools put all of the information and resources that these multiple partnerships have created to work in ways that improve student performance.

School improvement that dramatically improves the achievement of all kids is an inherently local endeavor. Educators, in partnership with their communities, must use rich and varied approaches tailored to their local contexts to meet student needs in ways that ensure high achievement for all.

At the state level, RIDE and its partners must promote and galvanize these local efforts by fueling them with new and better information, and by providing them with additional support and assistance where necessary.

For its part, RIDE has reallocated its own resources to provide maximum support for the Article 31/SALT agenda. RIDE's Field Service Teams are primarily focused on assisting schools and districts with the implementation of Article 31 and SALT. This focus will support the analysis *and use* of local data.

Consistent with Article 31, RIDE will negotiate performance targets (also known as Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP targets) with schools starting in fall 1998. RIDE will calculate these targets using 3-5 year averages. Using averages will mediate the single year gains or drops in school test scores that unusually high or low achieving groups of students may cause.

Negotiations will be informed by at least the following factors:

1. Standard and equity gaps in student performance.
2. Student performance in the school compared to the performance of similar students statewide.
3. The financial capacity of the school and its district.
4. The knowledge that the ultimate goal is to have every student meet the state standards.
5. Estimates of targets that will require schools to focus and stretch, but that are not unrealistically high in the short term.

Establishing these targets communicates the necessity of improving student achievement. The targets will engage schools in a process that helps them to identify necessary changes in practice and organization, and/or additional support that they may need, to reach the targets identified.

In cases where additional encouragement and support fail, RIDE, in accordance with Article 31 will intervene to improve education for students. It is the state's responsibility to step in where local communities cannot or will not for whatever reason.

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Creating a Culture of Responsibility

Creating a community-wide culture of responsibility for education is of vital importance to SALT and also to Article 31. Putting useful and understandable information into the hands of all citizens is a first step toward fulfilling this goal. To this end, RIDE and its partners have created school and district reports published for the first time this year as *Information Works*. The reports are designed to promote school – community dialogue by focusing public attention on student achievement successes and gaps, the necessity of closing those gaps, and the practices associated with high student performance.

Much greater public responsibility and support will be required as this information is put to use. No state-level support or intervention, no matter how well-done or sophisticated, can improve education in a local school for the long-term without the community's attention, leadership and support. Local citizens must charge themselves with looking at the new information on their schools as it becomes available and with using that information in responsible and constructive ways.

"Effective data collection and analysis in all areas of education reform will enable policymakers, educators, teachers, and students to take the pulse of the system and measure what their responsibilities are in order for true reform to occur."

Cristopher T. Cross, Amy Rukea Stempel. (1996). "Where are we going? Policy implications for data collection through 2010," in *From Data to Information: New Directions for the National Center for Education Statistics*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, p. 2-17.

New and more detailed information is being released about every school in the state via *Information Works* and the other aspects of SALT. Not all of this information is flattering, but it all can be used to establish and advance school and district improvement goals. **Communities should judge their schools by the actions they take based on this new information, rather than by what this baseline year shows.** Schools are now faced with a very different task – helping all students, rather than only some, reach high standards. Continuous improvement is attainable, immediate success is not and should not be expected.

All Rhode Islanders must contribute the patience, support and push required to create, and more importantly to use, the wealth of information needed to support sustained school improvement. Together, we will learn more about the kinds of information that are the most important and valuable. Over time, RIDE will drop information deemed unhelpful and will add and strengthen information deemed useful. *Information Works* is very much a work in progress.

Ultimately, we will have rich information on student performance, school practices and financial expenditures that will allow us to act in thoughtful and informed ways, to build systems that better support students, teachers, schools and families.

IV. Continuing Challenges

Rhode Island is on the right track. Educators and their many partners are working hard, with a sharpened focus on improving student performance. The achievement gaps outlined above, however, are large and will require sustained effort and attention to close.

Three challenges loom as potential threats to our collective ability to fully implement Article 31. These challenges are establishing equity, building capacity and maintaining political will and support.

Establishing Equity

The General Assembly and the Governor took an important step toward establishing equity with the passage of Article 31. Article 31 allocated an additional $25 million in state aid, nearly $18 million of which was distributed to districts based on need. Of the total $25 million, roughly $17 million went to our four poorest districts – Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Rhode Island's progress toward establishing equity has been recognized at the national level. In *Education Week's* 1998 *Quality Counts* report, Rhode Island received a "C" in the area of equity, as compared to a "D" last year.[3]

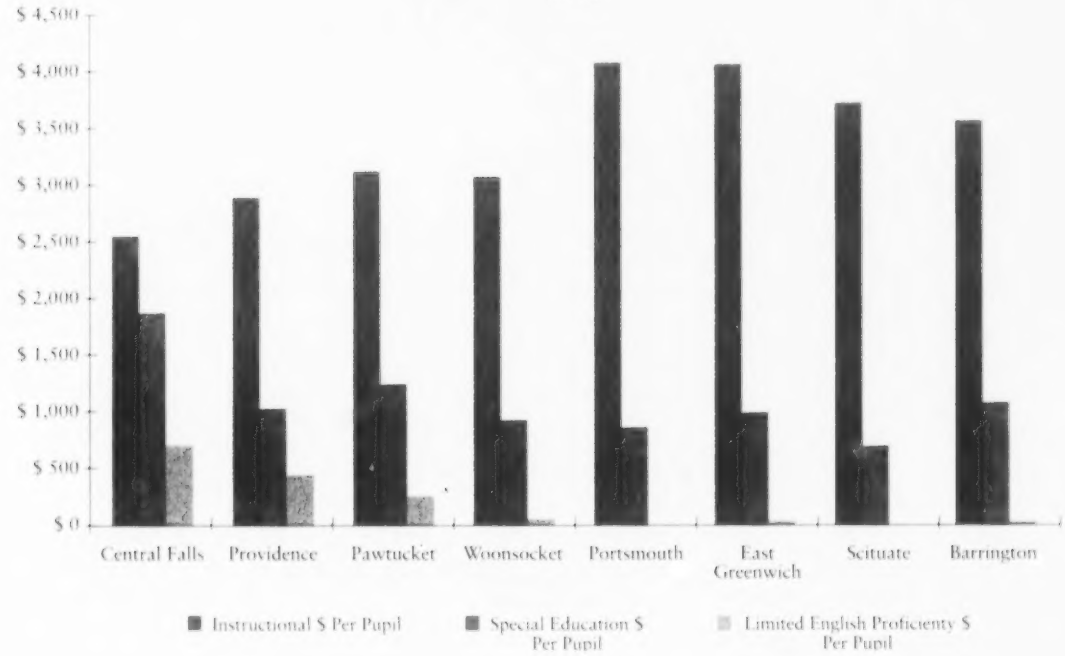
However, substantial inequities still remain. Rhode Island's average per pupil instructional expenditure is $3,781. This average instructional expenditure masks a considerable range. In 1996, total per pupil instructional expenditures when adjusted for student needs[4] ranged from a low of $2,884 in Central Falls to a high of $5,636 in Narragansett.

Instructional dollars are also spent differently, depending on the needs of the students in a particular district. Chart 10 shows the general and targeted instructional expenditures per pupil in a sample of eight districts. The four districts on the left – Central Falls, Providence, Pawtucket and Woonsocket – have low per pupil expenditures relative to the state as a whole. The four districts on the right – Portsmouth, East Greenwich, Scituate and Barrington – have high per pupil expenditures relative to the state as a whole. Looking at this chart, you see that the four poorer districts spend considerably more on instructional programs for students with special needs than do the wealthier districts, while spending considerably less on the general instruction that all students receive. Poorer districts in Rhode Island are fiscally unable to meet the needs of all their students.

Rhode Islanders, collectively, must address these disparities and their effects in order to help all students reach high standards. The need to address these disparities becomes especially apparent when we understand where Rhode Island's students live.

chart 10

General and Targeted Instructional Per Pupil Expenditures Across Districts 1976



"All Rhode Islanders – whether they still live in the cities or are among those who moved out to the suburbs after the second World War – share a common urban heritage. Likewise, the future of Rhode Island is inextricably linked with the destiny of its cities."

The Urban Strategy Project. (1998). *Strengthening Cities*. Providence, RI: Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council, Executive Summary.

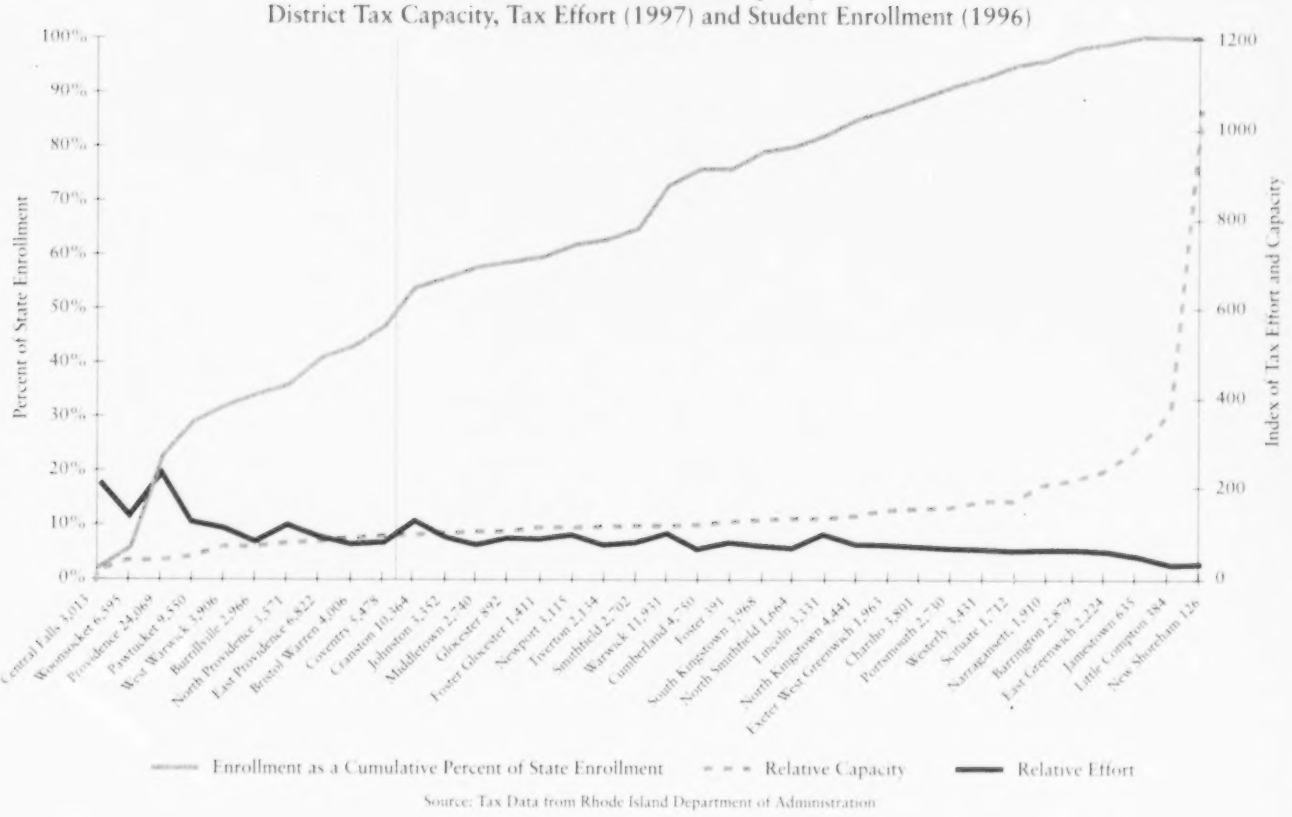
Chart 11 tracks relative tax capacity, relative effort and cumulative enrollment across districts.[5] Districts are ordered by their relative ability to fund education. The number beside the name of each district represents that district's student population. The vertical line running down the chart marks the point at which 50 percent of the state's total student enrollment is reached. Districts for which relative effort is greater than relative capacity are "maxed out" in terms of their ability to locally fund education.

Looking at the chart you can see that with the exceptions of Bristol Warren and Coventry, all the districts to the left of the vertical line are "maxed out," and with the exception of Cranston, all the districts to the right of the vertical line are not. Cranston has a larger student population than Bristol Warren and Coventry combined. This means that *over 50 percent of Rhode Island's students live in the nine communities in which local effort already outstrips local capacity.*

These nine communities include eight of the ten (excluding Newport and Warwick) characterized as "urban" by the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council's Urban Strategy Project in its report *Strengthening Cities*.[6] These communities are challenged by deteriorating infrastructure, higher crime rates, greater needs for housing and other social services and high effective property tax rates. Addressing the needs of these communities will require not only additional support and targeted resources for education, but also, the report argues, more comprehensive efforts to coordinate state

chart 11

Who is Affected by Tax Capacity?
District Tax Capacity, Tax Effort (1997) and Student Enrollment (1996)



Source: Tax Data from Rhode Island Department of Administration

and local policies and programs, build strong neighborhoods, improve fiscal competitiveness and infrastructure, and create jobs. Even within the eight urban communities, radically different needs exist. Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket, for example, have lower per pupil expenditures, greater concentrations of high need students and lower fiscal capacity than do the other four communities.

Building Capacity

Article 31 asks teachers to teach in fundamentally different ways that will result in students attaining the higher-level skills needed for the 21st Century. It also asks teachers to attend to their schools as wholes, rather than only their individual classrooms. They are asked to do this because student performance results from the compilation of the actions of the whole school, rather than from the actions that occur only in individual classrooms. In this broader context, educators, joined by parents and community partners, are asked to analyze school-wide data about student performance, the teaching and organizational practices, and the parent role that result in that level of performance. This is the first step in information-based school improvement. Schools must operate as much more cohesive organizations with agreed upon goals for students and decision-making and planning processes that are shared within the school and with the wider community.

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The skills, habits and behaviors described above are very different than those exhibited in many schools. Article 31 and SALT call for nothing short of fundamental change. For this change to occur, practitioners need the resources, opportunity, and time to learn and apply the newly required practices. High quality, effective professional development is on-going and part of the day-to-day work of schools, rather than a series of unrelated, one-shot workshops.

Some progress has been made on these fronts: The Professional Development Investment Fund, of Article 31, provided roughly $840,000 in additional money for professional development during the 1997-98 school year. These additional resources represent a good first step, but will need to be roughly tripled in the future.

"We need teachers who can experience themselves as architects of creative learning. And they need the conditions in their work to make that possible."

Arthur G. Wirth. (1992). *Education and Work for the Year 2000: Choices We Face*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, p. 28.

The Rhode Island Professional Development and Certification Policy Consortium is providing leadership in the development of requirements for individual professional development plans that will become a component of renewable certification. Over time, individual plans should become a lever for making professional development job-driven and embedded, rather than a potpourri of unrelated activities.

The Rhode Island Board of Regents and the Board of Governors for Higher Education have reestablished a Joint Committee on School/College Articulation. The goal of this committee is to build a K-16 system in order to strengthen teacher preparation, school improvement, and college-preparedness.

Reorienting teacher preparation so that teachers emerge prepared to teach and work in new ways is an enormous opportunity. As of early 1998, 22 percent of Rhode Island's teaching force was eligible to retire. Filling these positions as they open with teachers prepared to meet the new demands being placed on the profession will give the state a head start in equipping students for the 21st Century.

The lack of adequate time for planning and professional development presents a very large obstacle to the school improvement process. Members of RIDE's Field Service Teams consistently report that time is one of the biggest barriers facing the schools and districts with which they work. Rhode Island Carnegie School teachers (778 teachers in 15 schools) identified lack of adequate professional development time, difficulties in obtaining release time for planning and/or professional development, and lack of adequate time for planning and/or implementation as their three biggest barriers to implementation in the 1996-97 school year. Practitioners need more time for professional development during the academic year; they also need to find ways to use the time they have differently and more effectively. We need a 190 day year for the adults in schools.

Maintaining Political Will and Support

An enormous challenge facing every major education reform effort in the nation is maintaining the political will and support to sustain the reform for a sufficient period of time for it to become institutionalized and bear fruit. Reforming individual and institutional practices is not a rapid process, and neither is the education of children. Even if Rhode Island's schools could be reformed instantly today – and they cannot be – it would still take 12 years to have high school graduates who had experienced the completely reformed system.

"A school, like an automobile plant or insurance company, is a place of individual agents and vested interests. Change is hard and people yearn for ideas that can make change easy. The yearning for simple solutions is human nature. It is also very dangerous."

Richard J. Murnane, Frank Levy. (1996). *Teaching the New Basic Skills: Principles for Educating Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy*. NY: The Free Press, p. 201.

Making information work takes time. Educators, policymakers, parents and business leaders must strike a productive balance between demanding progress and holding realistic expectations for system-wide reform. They must also work together to build sustaining state-local partnerships in order to ensure that schools and the students in them get the support they need.

V. Resolution and Resolve

Practitioners and policymakers have made tremendous strides toward implementing Article 31 this year. The demands of the legislation are widely understood; systems to produce valid, reliable and useful information have been put in place; and that information will be returned to schools in the near term.

The challenge now is to put that information to use in ways that will engage practitioners, policymakers and the public in efforts that will build supportive systems for students. School committees, parents and educators must lead their communities in conversations about how to strengthen their stewardship to improve student achievement. These conversations must begin now; there is not a moment to spare in improving the lives and education of our children.

"Creating a broader dialogue must be seen as the necessary first step toward creating an effective consensus behind constructive change."

Liane Brouillette. (1996). *A Geology of School Reform: The Successive Restructurings of a School District*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. p. 240.

Educators, policymakers and communities are receiving help from other sectors in this endeavor:

- The Governor's Economic Policy Council has produced a blueprint that will revitalize Rhode Island's economy. Today's fourth graders are Rhode Island's work force of the future. Transitioning to the new economy of the 21st century will create support and demand for an education system that equips its students with the skills the new economy demands.
- The Urban Strategy Project of the the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council has proposed a multi-year strategy that will strengthen Rhode Island's urban communities through enhancing their livability and competitiveness. Many of our students live in urban areas. Strengthening their communities will reinforce their ability to succeed and strengthen us all.

We all must continue to move forward with resolution, resolve, and relentless focus on improving student achievement. We all need to join in realizing the Children's Cabinet goals to have: all children enter school ready to learn; all youth leave school prepared to lead productive lives; and all children and youth safe in their homes, neighborhoods and schools. The future we want is within our grasp if only we keep reaching for it.

[1] Education Week. (1997). *Quality counts: A report card on the condition of public education in the 50 states.* Washington, DC: Author.

[2] Rhode Island Economic Policy Council. (February 1997). *Meeting the challenge of the new economy.* Providence, RI: Author.

[3] Education Week. (1998). *Quality counts '98: The urban challenge, public education in the 50 states.* Washington, DC: Author.

[4] Pupils with differing needs are weighted as follows:

General education students – 1
Students qualifying for free or reduced lunch – 1.2
Students receiving services for limited proficiency in English – 2
Students receiving special education services – 2.6

These weights allow for the varying level of resources required to educate students with differing needs.

[5] "Relative capacity" stands for relative tax capacity, which is the amount of taxable property wealth available to a municipality per capita. The tax capacity of each district is divided by the statewide capacity and then multiplied by 100. If a district's tax capacity is below 100, it is lower than the statewide average. "Relative effort" stands for relative tax effort, which is the property tax rate of the municipality divided by the statewide average property tax rate, multiplied by 100. If a district's tax effort is above 100, it exceeds the statewide average.

[6] The Urban Strategy Project. (1998). *Strengthening cities.* Providence, RI: Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council.

Information Works *is a fascinating and complex undertaking. It is nothing less than the embodiment of Rhode Island's desire to improve education by creating access to quality information about schools and the students they serve. New partners and partnerships mobilized to bring about improvement and change; some envisioned this ambitious work and others brought it into being. The inter-agency cooperation has been impressive. Individual supporters and contributors are far too many to list here.*

However, we do want to acknowledge and thank the following institutions for their support, labors, intelligence and guidance:

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University of Rhode Island's National
Center for Public Education and Social Policy

To learn more about Information Works,
call or write to:

Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903
(401) 222-4600, ext. 2195
Voice/TTY (800) 645-6575
Relay RI (800) 745-5555

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